Introduction

Over the years I have been interested in how the secularization narrative plays out differently in the different arts, and I have looked, in particular, at the visual and plastic arts, classical music and architecture.[1] In this book, I consider how the secularization narrative plays out in English poetry. I believe that English poetry, over the whole span of its history from (say) the ninth century to the present, provides an extraordinarily sensitive lens for thinking about the changing nature of the Christian presence, as well as about its absences and the presence of other elements admixed with and sometimes alien to it.

There are various foci of my interest. One quite central focus turns on the ways in which a faith which, in its primary scriptures, has such strong reservations about the worldly institutions of wealth, violence, and power, interacts with, and adjusts to, very different ways of understanding. These might be pagan codes of honor, or classical humanism, or "the" Enlightenment. I ask how far "unworldly" Christianity, once established, adapts to "the world" (or secularizes) to meet very different and opposed construals of proper action and motive. Two obvious examples concern the markedly antagonistic construals of proper action and motive both in the Dark Ages (so-called) and in the Middle Ages, emanating from the aggression of the male warrior and associated codes of honor. One way and another, this tension remains active in Christianity throughout its established history.

The actions of Norman knights all over Europe and the East Mediterranean littoral illustrate the chasm between the Christianity of its normative scriptures in the Gospels and what the Normans took for granted. Just how deep this chasm ran was nicely caught by Longfellow in a poem where King

1. "Secularization in the Arts: the case of music," in Martin, *The Religious and the Secular*, 79–99; "Music and Religion: Ambivalence Towards the Aesthetic," in Martin, *Christian Language and Its Mutations*, 41–68; "Fifth Commentary: on the Return of the Liturgical in Modernist Music and Poetry and the Reconciliation Achieved by Liturgical Poetry and Music," in Martin, *Ruin and Restoration*, 81–98.

Robert of Sicily comments on the impertinence of monks chanting the radical sentiments of the Magnificat, "*Deposuit potentes*"—"He hath cast down the mighty from their seat and exalted them of low degree." In conventional understanding, the brutality of the knightly honor code, especially of the crusaders, is construed in a standard trope as Christians (as usual) behaving badly, but this is quite superficial. We are dealing with the inevitable partial secularization of a primitive Christianity radically opposed to the primacy of aggressive violence and wealth. (That the crusaders may have helped prevent the Islamicization of Europe is another and very complex question, as is the question of the splendors of their civilization from Monreale in Sicily to Durham.)

This understanding of secularization is quite distinct from the conventional understanding based on the fluctuations of belief and practice, though the two understandings are bound to be connected, because, where Christianity is politically established, there are extraneous motives for religious conformity. We are rather rarely, if ever, straightforwardly charting the lineaments of a purely personal faith. I am pointing to something that ought to be very obvious. Christianity is conspicuously unsuitable as a basis for political order, and is subject to radical modification (or secularization) once installed in that role. The resulting tension and interaction is precisely what gives "Christian" civilization its peculiar character. Indeed, Christian civilization is distinguished by the tension between limit and transformation, between what ineluctably is and a grand "what if?," and the secret seeds of the Gospel operate both within the walls of the church and extramurally. They take root wherever they fall. And the "impossible possibility" of Christianity mandates monasticism: high dedication, often with others of like mind, to sacrificial living.

Another focus of interest is the admixture within Christianity of (say) alchemy and astrology, and, indeed, of elements of obsolete and obsolescent science. Obviously a key aspect of secularization narratives concerns the erosions associated with science, including the "science" of biblical criticism. I am also very interested in the group of crucial changes associated with Romanticism. These include the subjectivization of faith, the historicization of experience, and the revolutionary and progressive rejection of faith (or at any rate of the politically established church) as integrally implicated in injustice. They also include the emergence of personalized spiritualities and alternative religions—and, along with all that, the surprising resilience of Christianity in modernity at precisely the juncture where it is ceasing straightforwardly to be implicated in the dynamics of political action and cultural establishment. What that resilience might mean is explored in the text, and is a central theme. Following the logic of my more than five

decades of work on secularization, I am, throughout, critical of secularization, understood as unilinear movement from the religious to the secular. I hope it will be clear how that critique meshes with my considerably longer if more intermittent engagement with peace and violence.

My critique does not mean that the nexus of changes given conventional expression" by the secularization narrative has no substance, nor that secularization theory can be dismissed as merely mythological. It contains mythological and ideological prescriptions as well as empirical descriptions, but that does not deprive it of explanatory power, once the prescriptive ideology of secularism is separated from secularization as a process. Indeed, I indicate various secularizations at different junctures in this book. There is, for example, the point at which the state becomes semi-secularized, and religion no longer provides the primary legitimation of political order. Religious institutions become differentiated, no longer built comprehensively into the key structures of state power. I also consider what David Jones called "the Break," which I interpret as the point when Christianity became culturally disestablished. Poets might be explicitly Christian, or have some engagement with Christianity, negative or positive; or they might be merely unengaged and indifferent.

I assume that English poetry represents an extraordinary peak of human achievement, and that it is, with music, one of the activities most closely related to religion, both as providing a support for faith and as providing alternatives to it. My epigraph from Derek Walcott, taken from a piece where he also speaks of gratitude, benediction, and silence, witnesses to the sheer complexity of the relationship. I believe that the relation of poetry to religion, either in its role as support or supplementation or in its role as an alternative, lies in its resistance to abstraction. Just as religion is an orientation to "the world" that resists reduction to ratiocination or abstract propositions, so poetry resists reductive paraphrase as a form of argument. Questions about conceptualization and abstraction, about paraphrase and argument, in poetry, and in poetics more generally, provide a major focus of my intellectual enterprise.

I have already implied a critical distinction between religion as a political phenomenon and religion *sui generis*. That needs careful unpacking, because I am not talking about religion as such. Contemporary comment on what religion *as such* does or does not do is endemic, but from a sociological viewpoint it is a complete waste of breath. For me, as a sociologist, generic "religion" is an illusory entity, a particular located construction, about which no generalizations are possible. Rather than discussing religion, I am talking specifically about *Christianity* as a very distinctive faith, especially so in its relation to power. Judaism and Islam are amenable to the dynamics

of politics in a way primitive Christianity is not. That throws into doubt the politically useful construct "Judaeo-Christianity," because in the critical matter of "rejecting the world" (as sociologists in the Weberian tradition formulate the matter) Christianity is very different from Judaism, however much it depends on it for its thematic repertoire.

I am saying that Judaism, like Islam, is not in need of secularization to be politically viable. In principle, it is already viable, even though it lacks a detailed theory of the political, such as is to be found in Machiavelli. Of course, until recently, Judaism has had scant opportunity to provide the legitimation of the state, but there is no inherent problem about its doing so. Judaism grows out of, and is nourished by, political aspirations related to release from slavery either in Egypt or Babylon. That conspicuous realism, making it the template for all manner of liberation movements, whether they are universal political ideologies like Marxism or particular forms of nationalism, also of necessity renders it morally ambiguous, in the way all political action is ambiguous. Moral ambiguity inheres in all political action. After all, in its normative scriptures Judaism replicates the violence it suffers in actual or anticipated violence on others. It participates in the negative reciprocity of the political, as the inevitable consequence of positive solidarity and demarcations of "the other," in a way that makes it simultaneously a paradigmatic narrative of *release* from oppression and a paradigmatic narrative of the *exercise* of oppression, either recollected in its account of the occupation of the Promised Land, or anticipated prophetically in the reversal of the humiliation of the Jewish people. The Hebrew Scriptures tell it how it is, both as regards liberation and oppression, so that we who inherit its scriptures may celebrate and lament accordingly. I may, as a Christian inheriting the Hebrew Scriptures, emphasize the potentials for liberation, in the way that African-Americans have, for the most part, focused on celebration, rather than lament. But that the narrative is bound to be double-edged, insofar as it is political, is also clear. "Blessed is he that taketh thy little ones and dasheth them against the stones" (Ps 137:9) is a beatitude consonant with the treatment of the Amalekites and the first-born of Egypt, whether by supposed divine command or divine intervention.

But then, within the prophetic tradition, there emerges another hermeneutic possibility that sidelines political salvation, through a redemptive suffering which takes upon the group or upon the "elect remnant" the appalling cost of the violence written into human affairs. This conception of receiving violence (conveyed in the image of the dumb lamb) without the normal correlative of negative reciprocity and retribution is not a straightforward possibility of ordinary politics. But it is the seedbed of Christianity: the teachings of the Gospels and the narrative of the crucifixion are based

on the rejection of negative reciprocity by an individual identified as the dumb lamb of prophecy. The Lamb is in his own person the divine victim of unjust violence, even though reversion to elements of negative reciprocity can be traced in oscillations within that primary redemptive narrative and throughout subsequent Christian history. Those oscillations between the workings of the invisible kingdom "not of this world" and making the kingdom come by violence, are associated with other oscillations. These move between antinomianism and perfectionism, between the elevation of the erotic and the setting aside of the erotic, and between internecine anarchy and total control. They are characteristic of what we might call the whole revolutionary Christian scenario. Exemplary withdrawal and exemplary violent revolution are mutually implicated.

This is by no means a diversion into the history of religions. It is an attempt to show how the issue of secularization, understood as Christianity's partial acceptance of political necessity, is bound up with the issue of violence. It includes the acceptance of violence as an expression of the solidarity of Us as against the solidarity of Them in the Darwinian struggle for inherently scarce "goods." As I said earlier, my preoccupation with the issue of violence over the last sixty years is integrally bound up with my preoccupation with secularization. The connection is made by Christ himself: "My kingdom is not of this world, else would my servants fight" (John 18:36). Penitence and forgiveness are not political virtues, and politicians who forgive their enemies are on their way out of politics. To embrace the primacy of the child and the outsider, to make the first last, to reject the anxieties of "the morrow," to reward equally those who work for the last few minutes and those who work all day, to recommend unlimited forgiveness, and to set aside family and even a place to live—"the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt 8:20)—is to imagine a world without power, for good or for ill. Such ideas can only work by infiltration, not implementation. (This is not to say, of course, that a broad political ethic compatible with Christianity is all that difficult, based on the status of the human, covenantal relations, neighborliness, the rejection of exploitation, and of the divinization of the political order or wealth. The real difficulty comes with balancing different principles in concrete cases, especially where all available choices are between degrees of evil. The belief in "a" Christian political solution is illusory.)

One understands the contrast between a politically viable Judaism and Christianity by contrasting the approach of the two faiths to the motifs of exile, return, Promised Land, temple, and Jerusalem. In Judaism we are talking about real exiles, and real returns to the Promised Land, or to Jerusalem and its temple, all of which is part of the ongoing struggle for identity (my

people) and identifiable space (our place and its borders). In Christianity we see a comprehensive switch of exile, temple, and peaceful city to the universal realm of metaphor. The most obvious switch to metaphor occurs in the reading in the liturgy for Easter Eve of the story of Noah, to be understood as code for humanity's entering the ark of salvation, prior to the sign of peace brought by the dove. The same metaphorical transformation occurs in the treatment of the crossing of the Red Sea as the Easter crossing from death to life. Once again, it is important to notice the role of oscillation in the governing narrative whereby exiles and returns, temples and cities, wildernesses and mountains, move backwards and forwards between universal and heavenly metaphors and particular and earthly promises.[2] The oscillation is sufficiently evident in the Gospels themselves for fundamentalists (not to mention some of the radical reformers of early modernity) to imagine the inauguration of a real kingdom on the Davidic model.

Here I anticipate an analysis below by Daniel Chua that fits my overall argument perfectly. According to Scripture, the heavenly imagery, for example, the city of peace, Jerusalem, is located "above" (Gal 4:26) and it comes on earth "as in heaven" by the secret working of potent seeds. The kingdom lies in wait. But then, roughly in the years 1790–1820, human action finally tries to bring the kingdom on earth by exemplary violence. It fully realizes in a secular mode the premonitory sacred violence of the English revolution. It defies the scriptural warning that the "kingdom cometh not by violence," and that means that God becomes otiose, as divine powers are harnessed to work in history, not secretly but openly. And this is the more plausible because institutional religion has been, to a large extent, absorbed by the politics of reaction, in a way that completely compromises its revolutionary message, except as discerned by a poetic prophet like William Blake. Indeed, it is even absorbed by the revolution itself, as established revolution reverts to religious legitimation, as in Napoleon's coronation. Universalism of all kinds has a coercive potential when faced by obstinate particularity. Napoleon provides an instructive instance of the coercive universalism of Enlightenment by seeking to eliminate the obstinate particularity of Israel: forced marriages would convert Jews into Frenchmen. If one wanted another instance it might be provided by Beethoven, whose sublime and forceful musical rhetoric set about bringing about the kingdom on earth, only to find Napoleon a Messiah false to the cause in proclaiming himself an earthly emperor. Thereafter the role of the perpetually postponed earthly revolution was transferred to art and poetry as its only possible carrier. As

2. Seligman and Weller, *How Things Count as the Same*.

in the epigraph from Gadamer, art takes on a consecrated role and burden as secular savior.

But this burden cannot be carried by poetry even though a great deal of poetry now acts as substitute religion and as a politics of frustrated yearning. This is where the rhetoric of poetry mimics the rhetoric of religious transformation, aided by the reinforcements of verbal music shared by both, and falsely projects transformation as a potential available in the here and now. Poetry is powered by the seductive devices of rhythm, alliteration, rhyme, assonance, and resonance. It is no more propositional and argumentative than is Christianity, but the illumination of the quotidian world it shares with Christianity is purely personal and not hedged about by an understanding of limits created by Christianity's prolonged collective encounter with historical realities. That means that its illuminations are not guided by the exercise of responsibility: that is, by the fusion of principle with chronic exigency that the political vocation properly requires.

Poetic rhetoric can be the vehicle for this evasion of political responsibility. It uses the invocative and the evocative derived from religious sources and imagery to say, "Just look at that," confident that its persuasive power will be self-evident. It bypasses argument and the constraints of analysis and causal historical narrative, exactly as Yeats explicitly proposed in his attack on philosophy. Prose can do the same, of course, and rhetoric is a major resource of political polemicists, but prose lacks the element of numinous surprise, even as it retains the capacity for tight empirical and causal analysis.

What, however, poetry does draw from Christianity, especially after the dire and minatory events of the twentieth century, are two suspicions set loose from their theological root. They are a suspicion of wealth and a suspicion of power, not based on a principled rejection of the world but on a preference for being nice and for exhibiting approved attitudes that take little account of costs further down the line or of the unavoidable paradoxes of political action. This is a major source of unanchored righteousness and the taproot of free-floating moral indignation. No wonder moralistic versions of Christianity, either on grounds of dubious biblical criticism or a sentimental preference for good endings, seek to excise the terrible conclusion of the proclamation of kingdom on Golgotha. If only the injunction to love or to imagine an alternative order of things could be the solution. I want to be clear. Liberal aspiration to amelioration is one thing, and admirable; I identify my own values as liberal in the tradition of L. T. Hobhouse and T. H. Green. Liberal refusal to face the frustrations built into the reality principle is another. This refusal, rooted in a secularized providence, is the source of chronic expressions of frustration with a world that will not

conform to the liberal script and bring history to an end as imagined by liberal triumphalists like Fukuyama.

As argued earlier in relation to the emphases of the Gospels, radical Christianity, in its proclamation of the kingdom "not of the world," nourishes elements that belong quite clearly to the narrative of redemption but cannot be realized on the political plane. These emphases are also the "elements" literally embodied in the Eucharist, which celebrates a gift not dependent, like political gifts, on a cycle of reciprocity. It is simply available to be received with praise and thanksgiving, and rests on the achievement of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation through penitence and confession. As the political revolution bears its bloody fruit in the elimination of opponents, and then mutates into the aesthetic, the return of initial hope and aspiration for another world, proclaimed and enacted in the protected enclave of the liturgy, becomes possible.

That long excursus attempts to explain why I am especially interested in the extent to which the supportive version of the link between poetry and religion is maintained in modernity, and even reinforced. I label that reinforcement as the "return of the liturgical," and I canvass the reasons for it, for example, the impact of the horrors of the twentieth century, especially on the more optimistic versions of progressive liberalism, or, indeed, on all expressions of human perfectibility which have no need of salvation. Liturgy, as I have already suggested, begins in brokenness and passes from penitence to thankfulness, from praise to the exchange of gifts in love, from a sense of the presence to reconciliation and peace. A reinforcement of religion in modernity is precisely not what conventional secularization theory would anticipate, although it is not as if poetry has figured much, if at all, in sociological accounts of secularization. My critique is throughout embedded quite precisely in a rejection of secular providence and teleology, and of the associated remodeling of man to fit the falsely predicted future that has among its ideological roots everything covered by Karl Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957).

I see the return of the liturgical as expressing a renewed sense, in a peak of human creativity, of the Christian narrative of ruin and restoration, corruption and redemption. As just explained, I relate that to the transfer of the Christian *telos* and *kairos* to history, and thus to all the bloodstained attempts to realize God's kingdom on earth, especially from the end of the eighteenth century to the end of the twentieth. Here I can let Daniel Chua speak for himself by way of some suggestive arguments in his *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (1999). There he writes of the demand to act, rather than to wait, in fin-de-siècle crises where revolution or terror or messianic tyrants try to force the apocalypse to manifest itself

here and now and break finally with the past and with the yoke of man's "self-incurred tutelage."[3] Truth is to be disclosed by history, as humankind shapes the perfect future from its own resources. Kant even muttered the words of the *nunc dimittis*, "for mine eyes have seen thy salvation," as he heard of the French revolution. But there is, of course, no *parousia*, only the ordeal of its prolongation. "The revenge of God on mankind for stealing his *kairos* was aesthetic theory," the solving of the problem of politics through the aesthetic, as it spun out the end and yearned for an unattainable future.[4] Art became the language of the revolution in person.

I am not for a moment suggesting that some modern poets are straightforwardly engaging in the writing of liturgy. That would convert a remarkable proximity into an inappropriate identity. It may well have been the case, as Christopher Isherwood observed of Auden, that even in his secular years he had a tendency to combine grand opera with high mass, but he was not writing liturgy. What he eventually did was to write something with liturgical characteristics in his "Horae Canonicae." In the same way, Eliot's "Ash Wednesday" and Geoffrey Hill's *Tenebrae* are para-liturgical works, rather than liturgy proper. Liturgy has its own proper autonomy as the concrete embodiment and reenactment of the Christian narrative in the company of other Christians.

It will be obvious that I have had recourse to the vast amount of material now available through the internet. I have read and often read aloud a vast amount of English poetry from *Beowulf* to the present, but I have also had to rely on critical guides to a vast terrain, and on competent summaries. Before writing this book, I was a reader of poetry, but not well-versed in criticism and schools of criticism. I have had to acquire and absorb much critical literature in the course of writing, and, in doing that, I have stumbled on kinds of literary analysis that might have stayed permanently out of my sight. I am, after all, a sociologist, and the "subtle schools" have not detained me overmuch. For a sociologist, I may be unusually well acquainted with poetry, as I am also unusually well acquainted with theology, but that is not much of a claim, given the preoccupations of most of my sociological colleagues. It happens to be a consequence of my peculiar formation as someone who failed to enter university to read English (not to mention failing a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music) and who read literature and theology almost entirely as a project of self-education. As a result of this idiosyncratic formation, I have scant expertise in literary criticism, beyond some shadowy ideas about close reading, deconstruction, and historicism.

3. Chua, *Absolute Music*, 129.
4. Chua, *Absolute Music*, 246.

Reluctantly, I have used potted biographies to locate poets before making comments, usually quite brief, about poetic placement and achievement. That makes decent prose quite difficult. At the same time, my treatment has become more extended the closer I have come to the special problems of the modern period. That applies in particular to the situation which Eliot characterized in *The Rock* as never having happened before: people either turning to no gods and or to false gods like the dialectic.[5] And I have chosen my numerous secular poets, for example Thom Gunn and Carol Ann Duffy, mainly as presenting *types* of perspective.

I am interested in the different ways in which poets negotiate the axes of human life existentially, emotionally, and intellectually. I want to explore what meaning, purpose, and hope, or lack of meaning, purpose, and hope, they discern in the human predicament. That includes the irresolvable paradoxes (or *aporias*) that afflict and bedevil all the schemes we devise to shape experience and organize our perspectives. In what different ways, for example, do two Christian poets, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, approach the great questions of their shared faith? In what different ways do two Christian poets, Eliot and Auden, parse the great questions, the former in a Catholic manner and the latter in a Protestant manner? Sometimes these questions are embedded in much larger cultural and theological contexts that I can do no more than gesture towards. And it must be obvious that I cannot hope to present a representative sample of so many secular poets contrasted with so many religious ones. This is a qualitative, almost a phenomenological study, and it selects signal features of broad literary landscapes. It maps without counting.

There is a broad argument undergirding my approach, and it relates to the particular form of secularity present in the latter years of the eighteenth century, compared with the religious preoccupations of the seventeenth century up to the 1670s and the religious preoccupations of the nineteenth century after the 1830s. There is a debate among literary critics of the Victorian period explicitly focused on secularization, and on whether we discern harbingers of modern secularity in the poets of the nineteenth century. This is an instance of literary and sociological interests overlapping, and it means that in reading the literary critics I find myself on familiar ground. For example, I find myself running into references to the work of Charles Taylor on secularization over the last half millennium. Naturally, from my own critical position, I sympathize with those who do not want to subsume the literary study of late nineteenth-century poetry within the problematic of the secularization thesis. But the issue is plainly very complicated and I

5. Eliot, *The Rock*, section 7, in *Collected Poems, 1909–1962*, 177–78.

have spent some time on those like Arnold, Clough, Swinburne, Hardy, and Housman whom I call avatars of secularity.

In every sphere of discussion and with respect to every period, I have become aware of alternative and contradictory approaches. There is a lack of consensus with regard to many of the issues central to the present enquiry. For example, there are various views about the religious sublime in the eighteenth century, bearing directly on whether we may characterize that century as secular. Some observers argue that the supposedly secular century was simply religious in a different way. That kind of argument is just as endemic in sociology as it is in literature. As in sociology, so in literary criticism: arguments turn on the definitions you deploy and the conceptual boundaries you draw. I know there are those who see Wordsworth as more straightforwardly Christian than I take him to be. Without anything approaching consensus, I am forced to make my own judgments. As St. Joan said to the inquisitor in Shaw's famous play, "With what other judgment can I judge but my own?"

Several important issues arise here. One relates to subjective meaning, rather than objective counting. In standard discussions of secularization from a sociological perspective, most of the evidence is quantitative, and concerns religious belief and practice and the role of religious institutions. If you are a historian or sociologist, you can count bodies in church in the Victorian period over a given time scale to determine a statistical trend. But you cannot count changes in meaning. At most you may chart changes in vocabulary, and in the import of specific terms as indices of changes in meaning and ethos, a process of particular significance in any study of secularization in poetry. For example, "faith," in the vocabulary of Tennyson, has a much more attenuated meaning than it would have had for Donne. Such changes count crucially, but they cannot be counted. At best they can be identified as more or less indicative or influential.

Another issue relates to how you understand the essence of a faith and what you believe to be its constitutive characteristics, however much these may shift according to context. This looks like essentialism, and essentialism counts as an intellectual crime, but enquiries about the changing travails of faith and doubt presuppose that you know in what precisely you have believed or doubted. When the political scientist Mark A. Smith argues that Christians today share more with secular coevals than with Christians in the past, you are forced to ask what is essential and what expendable about Christianity.[6] Without some presupposition about what properly constitutes Christianity, you could not even ask when and how the Christian faith

6. Smith, *Secular Faith*.

has been so subject to revision that another faith has taken its place. *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (1965) by Philip Rieff maps the way the releases of culture have undermined the controls and created the autonomous self-regarding individual who questions all notions of good and evil, purpose and authority.[7] That assumes that you know what it is that has been replaced

As I have already indicated, one major focus for me over the years has been to see how alternative secularization narratives play out in relation to the different arts: for example, the contrast between a narrative based on the visual arts and one based on "classical" music or, in this case, English poetry. In that enterprise we are dealing with questions of meaning that sociologists have always found difficult to integrate with analyses based on structural processes such as functional differentiation and privatization. The difficulty is so great that it is rarely even attempted. There are accounts of changes in intellectual orientation, for example, studies of the cultures of doubt in the late nineteenth century, and there are studies of religious practice in the decades up to and following the 1851 census, but it is not easy to integrate them. Owen Chadwick's *The Secularisation of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (1976) is one important attempt to do so.[8] Charles Taylor's writings, especially *A Secular Age* (2007), are remarkable essays in integration, though there is always a tendency in any analysis to slip either towards sociology or the history of ideas.[9] In the second half of the nineteenth century, it really is difficult to know by what criteria anyone might validate Matthew Arnold's claim to be "wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born," or his suggestion that what we once took for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. These assertions are very germane, indeed crucial, to this present enquiry, but the criteria of verification are not obvious. Matthew Arnold thought deference to scientific criteria important, but his own gnomic statements do not conform to them any more than his statements about the receding sea of faith conformed to the actual state of religion in the mid-nineteenth century.

A major problem concerns the way secularization narratives are based on different time scales. One narrative is based on a historical tripod based in the high Middle Ages or in high Victorianism, seen as high points of religion. Once accept a baseline located at a high point, and decline inevitably follows. Other narratives are based on the changes initiated by the scientific revolution from the late seventeenth century on, or else on

7. Rieff, *Triumph of the Therapeutic*.
8. Chadwick, *Secularisation of the European Mind*.
9. Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

the changes initiated by the French Revolution. A third relevant narrative, considerably more complex, is organized over three millennia and involves the emergence of Christianity itself as part of the Axial Revolution, which exhibited a reserve towards "the world," in the light of a transcendent possibility or eschatological promise. In this text, all these time scales are in play, but it is worth emphasizing that the very idea of Christian challenge to, and compromise with, the imperatives of the secular world, belongs to the perspective derived from the Axial Revolution.

What I attempt here is affiliated with the extended secularization narrative based on three millennia, rather than with narratives based on the half a millennium since 1500, or on the period since 1870 or since 1960. It takes off from the ninth century, when Christianity was first fully established in England, and, in the course of taking root, incorporated paganism and adapted to it. I find it difficult to assess to what extent that incorporation extended to the pagan mode of enchantment, but it seems clear that the incorporation extended to the pagan honor code. The pagan honor code provides the default position of human society, and has fundamental implications for the conduct of the political realm. It was the ethos adopted by those whom Nietzsche called the "blond beasts of prey." Against this profoundly embedded code, Christianity made very partial headway, and, in the twentieth century, the beasts of prey posed a direct challenge, and helped push forward "the Break" noted by David Jones.

That apart, it is clear that in one form or another, paganism is constantly resurgent, not just in the Renaissance, but by way of the education of elites in Greek and Latin culture over many centuries. That in itself trails complexities, because Renaissance humanists not only practiced a common rhetoric that in reality prevailed from Chaucer until the late eighteenth century, as Brian Vickers has argued, but treated the classics as para-scriptures, susceptible to Christian interpretation. That authorizes how Milton, or indeed Samuel Johnson, used the Bible and the classics as part of the same frame of reference.